

(smoffett) sermons\m1n\uni3.1ec

NEVER GIVE UP
A New Millennium For Mission
 Romans 8: 31b, 35-39.

The new millennium is here. (I'm not going to argue whether it began last January or will begin next January). I'm more interested in what you, in your generation, are going to do about Christ's great missionary commission. He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole world." He is still saying that to us. And in every millennium there have been Christians who excuse themselves out.

Back at the beginning it was Judas who betrayed him, and Thomas who—according to tradition—just didn't want to be a missionary, not to India. That tradition isn't Bible, but it carries a message about disciples and missions. It's very old, about 250 AD in an apocryphal book (The Acts of Thomas). It says that when the disciples gathered after the resurrection to decide how they were going to carry out their Lord's great missionary command, "Go into all the world...". they asked, "But where in the world should we go?" And not knowing much about the world outside their little Palestine, for they were simple people, they decided to use the same way that the real book of Acts tells us they used to elect a successor to Judas (Acts 1:25). They cast lots! They divided up the world into 12 parts, and cast lots for the different parts, says the old tradition. Thomas's lot fell on India. But Thomas, being Thomas, was still being difficult. He said, "I'm not going to India. I don't know the language, and besides, its too far away."

Well, remember that is apocrypha, not Bible, and I'm not going to suggest that if you decide to be a missionary you begin by casting lots for where you should go. There are better ways. But also remember that

NEW MILLENNIUM
 "Never Give Up"

there is good reason to believe that Thomas did eventually end up in India. He's called "the apostle to Asia". He started badly, but he ended up in the right place. What seems like a bad start can, in God's providence, turn out for His glory.

I. So my first point for you here at the beginning of your new millennium is something of a downer. It's this:

DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH.

Each of the first two millenia began with as much trouble as success. Why do you think our third millennium will be any different? But also why should I be so negative about it. Is anything too much for God? Of course not. But that is a different matter. What I want to talk about is you and me, and what we, imperfect disciples that we are, will do in mission in this new millennium.

When I look at Jesus, and see what he said to his disciples when he sent them out into the world, I have a good model for being a little negative and rather cautious about being too triumphalist about prospects for the beginning of this new millennium. Two thousand years ago Jesus began with a warning as well as a commission. Later he would say, "Go ye into all the world..." But first, here in the Gospel of John, chapters 14 to 16, in what is called his "farewell sermon" he points ahead to dark trouble. He said, "In the world you [will] have tribulation". He said, "The world will hate you; the world will persecute you; the world will kill you." The warning came first, then the great commission, and the mission would not be a rose=garden.

So let me be just as honest as Jesus and tell you how new millennia usually begin in Christian history. The first one began with

persecution. The second with moral decay. In the Christian life, beginnings can be rough. My father was the first resident missionary in what is now North Korea. About 110 years ago. He was stoned in the streets of the old northern capital, Pyongyang. Six times in one year he was driven out of the city.

The first millennium began a little like that. It began with a man and a pregnant woman, far from home, and no room for them in the inn. Their baby was born in a manger. A hundred babies were killed in Bethlehem that same year, and finally Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus were driven out and fled to Egypt.

The beginning of the second millennium was not quite as violent, but it was no triumph, either. Even in the church there was corruption and decay. So much so that some Christians thought that Jesus would have to come back, as he promised, and cleanse the temple. As the year 1000 approached, they thought the time had come. And they were so sure that they sold all they had, put on white robes and went out into the hills to welcome him. And he didn't come. A good many of them just gave up and wept. They had expected too much. They expected God to follow their timetable, not His. They forgot that to God, a thousand years is but as a day as it passes.

Looking back, we call the beginning of that second millennium, "The Dark Ages". A coarser name for the church about that time was "The Papal Pornocracy" (914-1003 AD). The church of the dark ages was in no shape to begin a new millennium. It was too much like us.

This is our new millennium, but these are not good times for our mainline churches. We are losing members in a hemorrhage of

Between a third and half of that world goes to bed hungry every night. Jesus fed the five thousand. Feeding the hungry is our Christian mission.

Most of that world's people are sick and in pain. Healing the sick is our Christian mission. (Lk. 9:2). Jesus told his disciples, "Preach the gospel...and heal the sick.

Half of all the world's people can't read or write, they are functionally illiterate. Literacy and Bible translation are our Christian mission. Jesus said, "Go, make disciples,. teaching them. (Mt. 28: 19,20).

More than half of the world's people suffer from injustice and oppression. The never =ending struggle for justice and human rights is our Christian mission. The Bible says, "The Lord...executes justice for the oppress; [He sets the prisoner free. (Ps. 146).

The whole world, they say, teeters on the brink of instant total and unprecedented physical destruction. Peace is a Christian mission. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9).

And if all this is not enough mission for our new millennium—the struggle against human hunger, ignorance, suffering, poverty, injustice and war—what more can I say? Well, there is one thing I must say. You can do all this in mission, and still fail in the Christian world mission. You can do all this and leave the deepest need of the human heart unmet. There is still the final frontier. Two thirds of the world's people, after two thousand years, still do not know and believe the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Jesus said "What shall it profit them if they gain the whole world and lose [their] own soul[s] (Matt. 16:26).

This is God's gift to us—a new millennium for mission. Now begin to make it yours.

- Samuel Hugh Moffett